

Middle East

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The positions and beliefs adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) on aspects of the Palestinian issue, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, are of major interest as they directed MB policies and enabled it to mobilize opinion against Jordan's foreign policy regarding Palestine. The framework of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's views on Palestine was based on the Islamization of the Palestinian question by the prophetic claim that Jerusalem-Palestine is one 'Islamic land' and by asserting the religious duty of Jordan to play a strategic role in defending an Islamic cause. Also, they believe that the conflict with Israel is a religio-civilization conflict, not a political one, between Islam and Judaism.

For the MB the Palestine problem is central. The liberation of all of Palestine (including the land controlled by Israelis in 1948) is considered as both a religious and an Arab nationalist duty, given the historic importance of Jerusalem and Palestine as an 'Islamic land'. The MB was deeply concerned with the Palestinian issue at an early stage and shared the belief that Jordan had a special role to play, based on its proximity to Israel and its vulnerability to Israeli ambitions. The MB also believed that the land of Jordan is, in an eschatological sense, 'the land of mobilization and constancy' (*Ard al-Hashd wa al-Ribat*) for the whole Muslim world in its battle for the liberation of Palestine. This religious perspective is taken from the MB's understanding of the meaning of a *hadith*, in which it was reported that the Prophet said Muslims will fight and defeat the Jews one day before the end of the world, and that the place of Muslims will be on the east side of the Jordan River, while the Jews will be on the west side (i.e. the so-called East and West Banks). Most *hadith* compilations mention that the Muslims will be victorious in the fight against the Jews, but they do not indicate the place of battle, excepting one famous *hadith* transmitted by Nur al-Din 'Ali al-Haythami (d. AD 807) in his *Majma' al-Zawa'id wa Manba' al-Fawa'id*.²

The MB's literature and interviews with its leaders confirm that it continues to believe in these prophecies. They have, in fact, become a source of the MB's philosophy and ideology regarding the Palestinian issue. MB leaders believe that the Muslims will liberate the whole of Palestine and will gain a religious victory in their battle with the Jews, in accordance with the Prophet's promise. As it was succinctly put by Yusef al-Azam, a leading MB figure and former minister of social affairs: 'The victory is inevitable but it needs a long breath.'

The MB also believes that Israel was created as a foreign 'infection' in the Islamic world and that its expansion is motivated by the ambition to divide the Arab and Islamic world. The MB's view of the Jews is based on many Quranic verses and historical events. The MB has described the Jews as 'dishonest', 'defilers of the prophets', 'liars', 'God's adversaries', and 'corrupt'. The distinction between Jews, Zionists, and Israelis is not

'The political involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Jordan goes back to the establishment of the state. It was established upon Jordanian Independence in 1946 with King Abdullah's approval. It formed many offices and branches in Palestinian cities such as Jerusalem and in the West and East Banks. It participated in the 1948 war against the Jews in Palestine, under the first MB leader, Abd al-Latif Abu Qaurah. The MB joined with other members of the IMB (International Muslim Brotherhood) in mobilizing Arabs to participate in the war. They trained fighters, collected money, bought weapons, cooperated with the other popular Arab organizations and with the Arab League, and exerted popular political pressure on the government to become more effective in the struggle.'

The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's Perceptions of the Palestinian Issue¹

made clear by the MB, although it does recognize Judaism and the Jews as a religious community, but essentially the MB believes that conflict with the Jews and Zionism is a conflict between two opposing civilizations based on religion.

From the MB perspective, to give up Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic rights in Palestine is unacceptable as far as the Islamic Shari'ah and faith are concerned. Not a single inch of the land 'blessed by Allah', the first *qiblah* (the Muslims' prayer orientation) for Muslims, nor the third most sacred shrine in Islam can be given away. This land can never be subjected to bargaining since it is a trust whose preservation is the responsibility of all Muslim generations until the Judgement Day. Any concessions constitute an act of injustice to future generations and an arbitrary measure that is rejected by the Islamic religion. The opinion of non-governmental Muslim scholars and organizations has remained unchanged in *fatwas* issued in 1937, 1947, 1956, 1968, and 1979. In a recent *fatwa* issued after the intifada began in December 1987, a group of Muslim scholars (including MB leaders) stated the following:

'By virtue of the covenant which Allah put upon us in order to proclaim the truth and explain it to the people, we hereby declare that jihad is the sole means to liberate Palestine, that it is not permissible under any circumstance to concede a single square inch of the Land of Palestine to the Jews, and that no person or organization has the right or the authority to consent to the Jewish claims in Palestine or concede any part of it to the Jews or recognize their existence on any part of its soil.'³

In the same statement they also called for Islamization of the Palestinian issue.

This view of the MB contrasts with that of the Jordanian government, which recognizes the Israeli state. The MB accepts the Jewish minority, which was settled in Palestine before 1918 (before the British colonized it), as was expressed by Ibrahim Ghushah (former MB leader and the spokesman of Hamas), but under Muslim majority rule. It further accepts the establishment of a Palestinian state in any part of liberated Palestinian land, but only as a step toward full liberation.

The MB and the Palestinian leadership

Given this position of the MB, Palestinian nationalist organizations were not considered important. In fact, as regards the MB's position and views *vis-à-vis* the PLO, in the early and mid-1980s, the literature of the MB generally did not view the PLO positively. At the same time it did not declare directly that

the PLO was not the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. The MB differed from the Jordanian government in that it was more concerned with the PLO's ideology and policy than with the issue of the PLO's representation of the Palestinian people, whether inside or outside Jordan. The MB in Jordan was far more hostile to the PLO than were other branches of the International Muslim Brotherhood (IMB), particularly in Egypt. In the early 1980s, the attitude of the MB towards the PLO appears to have been more flexible than in the late 1980s after the appearance of Hamas. There was an inner feeling or common belief among some leaders of the MB that the PLO was 'a Palestinian Front which represents "part" of the Palestinian people.' In a personal interview, Ziad Abu Ghanimah, a former spokesman of the MB said, 'We are the ones representing the [Palestinian] issue, not others such as the Arab Governments or the PLO.'

MB and the Palestinian Authority

The MB's position and views *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian Authority (PA) came into existence following Oslo Accords (September 1993). To begin with, it should be clear that the PA is almost a complete offshoot of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which was there before signing the aforementioned agreements. The MB has so far declared no clear position regarding the recognition of the PA as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In other words, the MB has adopted the same view as Hamas; the PA, for them, is only one part of the Palestinian people. Therefore, they do not recognize the political legitimacy of the PA leadership of the Palestinian people. This, however, does not mean that the MB refuses to co-exist with the PA as a *de facto* leadership. On the other hand, the MB takes Hamas as its Palestinian brother in Palestine. It is not surprising that the two sides share the same ideology and close policies.

The MB and Jordan's relation with the West Bank

With regard to Jordan's relationship to the West Bank, the MB expressed through its former spokesman in Parliament, Yusef al Azam, the belief that 'we are in the two Banks one nation in blood and in family. We are one people not two.'⁴ On this basis the MB tended to support the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan after its liberation from the Israeli occupation. It seemed that this support was based on the MB's principle of calling for Islamic world unity, more than on its political support for the Jordanian government's policy towards the West Bank. The MB therefore rejected the government's decision to disengage from the West Bank in July 1988.

The MB and the peace initiatives

The MB believed that all present peaceful initiatives and agreements – be they American, Israeli, Arab, or Palestinian – should be rejected because they surrender part of Palestine. As for the stand of the MB concerning the Palestinian-Israeli peace treaty (Oslo, 1993) and the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty of 1994, the movement declared, through its political and official statements and through its deputies at the Jordanian Parliament, its rejection of the above-mentioned treaties. In fact, it had launched a number of peaceful demonstrations as a means of protest. Furthermore, the MB demanded that the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty be frozen as one of its conditions to end its boycott of the 1997 Parliament elections.

It rejected all UN resolutions, in particular Resolution(s) 181, 242, and 338, because they were deemed inconsistent with standards of Islamic justice. The MB further asserted that negotiation or conciliation with the Zionist enemy, 'the usurper of Muslim land', in a way which leads to the surrender of Muslims' rights and land, were opposed by Islamic law.

The practical means of asserting Palestinian Islamic rights was *jihad*. The MB believed that this was the sole means of liberating Palestine from the Zionists and those who are behind them. The starting points for *jihad* are the Muslim peoples, supporters of the Palestinian Muslim people, and the Islamic lands, in particular the lands of the front-line states.⁵

Abdullah al-Akailah, former deputy leader of the Islamic Action Party and MP, pointed out:

'If we do not own the means of jihad or defence now, we demand of the Jordanian and other Islamic governments and people to prepare themselves. We do not want to compel our government to become involved in a military confrontation with a powerful enemy in this stage of weakness. Power is not everlasting and weakness is not to continue for ever.'

The MB and the Palestinian-Jordanians

With regard to the Jordanians of Palestinian origin, the MB expresses supreme loyalty to Islamic precepts, and priority is given to the promoting of an Islamic identity. As a result of this, it refuses to admit any distinction between a Jordanian and Palestinian identity. Both peoples, it insists, must have equal rights in citizenship and in Palestinian and Jordanian affairs, regardless of their citizenship or origin. This does not

mean that the MB accepts the Israeli idea of the 'Jordanian option' for the Palestinians. It totally rejects it. Through Islamizing the Palestinian issue, the distinction between Palestinians and Jordanians, and that between Palestine and Jordan are dissolved.

Summarizing these issues in a personal interview, Dr Isaac Farhan, one of the leading figures of the MB and the former Secretary-General of the Islamic Action Front Party, starkly expressed the contrasting view of the MB of Palestine:

'We consider the Palestinian issue a basic and key issue for three reasons. First, on the ideological side, the defence of Palestine is defence of the Islamic ideology. Second, on the national side (*umma*), the Israeli existence inside the nation's body divides and destroys the nation. Third, as homeland (*watan*), Palestine is an Arab and Islamic land and the homeland must not be surrendered.'

The MB's perceptions of the Palestinian issue were based on an ideology deriving from purely religious views, but as Jamil Abu Bakir, MB spokesman, in a personal interview pointed out, although the Palestinian issue was a 'holy cause', the MB wanted to avoid conflict with the Jordanian government, even though it opposed the peace process and possible consequences such as economic and cultural cooperation between Jordan and Israel.

It can be said that the MB, despite its ideological view, has always avoided collision with the government, even with all the 'U-turns' the government has chosen, in so far as the Palestinian issue is concerned. This

clearly indicates the pragmatic nature of the movement's political behaviour, as well as its ability to strike a balance between its ideological stands on the one side and all variables on the regional and Jordanian political arena on the other. ◆

Notes

1. For more details, see the MB memorandum to the Palestine National Council (PNC) held in Amman in 1984; the election programme of the MB candidates in the parliamentary elections in 1989; and the speeches of the MB members in the Parliament. See, for example, the minutes of the Jordanian Parliaments in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1992 and 1993. See also the political statement of the MB statement entitled 'Why the MB rejects Madrid conference and rejects the bilateral and multilateral negotiations with our Jewish enemy', 1992.
2. Nur al-din Ali al-Haythami, (1982), *Majma' al-Zawa'id wa Manba' al-Fawa'id*. Vol. VII, Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, Beirut, p. 347-349.
3. *Our Stand Towards the Settlement*, the Information Office, Hamas, June 1991.
4. Yusef al-Azam, MP and member of the MB, Minutes of the Jordanian Parliament, first meeting in the first regular session, 21 January 1984, p. 12.
5. The Election Programme of the MB, *op.cit*, pp 24-25.

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